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Undone

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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My art has become rooted in a process of layering. I layer materials to explore technique and to express the concept of *inside versus outside*. The evidence of multiple layers of materials is symbolically connected to what is happening within my own life. I want the viewer to see an indication of deeper layers of process and materials rather than just the polished surface of an artwork. This layering process can also be seen as a metaphor for human nature, what we see on the outside is not always what is on the inside.

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Introduction

Upon completing my undergraduate degree from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in 1996, I knew that I would one day want to also complete a graduate degree. The Bachelor of Fine Arts I received in Art Education led me to teach elementary art and to then go on to teach middle school art. As a teacher, I believe that professional development and ongoing education are important for personal and professional growth. VCU's Master of Interdisciplinary Studies (MIS) program appealed to me because it allowed me to fulfill my goals for professional development, while being able to focus on my own creativity. The classes also carry over into my classroom and inspire me to introduce new knowledge to my students.

My Aesthetics

As I began taking classes through the MIS program, it did not occur to me to consider my subject matter. I worked with what I was comfortable with and that was nature. Nature seemed to be an endless source of inspiration and because it surrounded me everyday, I saw limitless possibilities for art.

I continued using nature until I found myself in my first graduate painting class. I was outside of my comfort zone and decided to push my subject matter while I was learning to paint. Through the influence of the instructor, I began to feel more at ease with the idea of expanding my choice of imagery. It was as if I had given myself permission to try something new.

Through my studies, my subject matter has evolved into a much more subtle series of images. I have intentionally allowed the images to remain ambiguous to the viewer while retaining deeper personal meaning for myself. The subject of my art has become a record of my life events and it is emotionally and creatively therapeutic. Making art in this way helps me to digest information and make sense of everyday life. It was intimidating at first to put myself in my work but I soon realized a positive impact on my art and my state of mind. My art has become clearer and more focused. Series have also begun to emerge as I am better able to emotionally connect events and express them in my art. I have learned to connect myself to my work.

My general working process involves a blend of intentional and unintentional marks on a variety of surfaces. I have worked on paper, plastic, wood, and canvas and each ground leads to a different result. When I first began to paint, I tried to control every mark. However, by using tools such as palette knives, unintentional marks occurred through the application of paint. I started to realize that this unplanned element added dimension and meaning.

In my printmaking and computer art, I am unable to totally control the outcome due to the nature of the media and the processes. For instance, one can never really envision what is going to be on the other side when a printing block is inked and applied to paper, and the paper is then pulled back. There are often unintentional marks that become part of the composition. I have learned to appreciate the uncontrolled mark and now allow unintentional happenings within a work of art to inspire me.

Computer Art

My first experience with a digital camera was in the MIS program. The immediacy of this technology allowed me many options for creating images. I had not used photographs in my work up until this point and now find their use to be indispensable. Instantly seeing a photograph, from which you want to work, and being able to make changes to the picture is an invaluable tool in planning and producing a work.

The use of heat transfers of digital images is what inspired me to enroll in my first MIS class. The medium was new to me and seemed to hold many possibilities for my art. This process involves using a computer printer to print an image onto t-shirt transfer paper and then transferring the image to another surface using heat. The first heat transfers that I attempted involve simple images from nature that I manipulated using computer software and then transferred onto paper with an iron, such as in *Magenta Leaf* (Appendix, 1). I presented this manipulated photograph as a finished piece of art. As I continued to explore this medium, I realized that this basic approach was not enough to satisfy my aesthetic. A click of a shutter and a click of a mouse did not amount to art. I soon began to use the digital image as a starting point in a more involved process, which now includes mixed media and transfer techniques.

I now incorporate digital images of my own artwork into other pieces of work. I isolate sections of previous artworks, such as a block of color or a line, and digitally photograph and place these elements into other works. This technique is evident in the mixed media print, *Doesn't Always Happen III* (Appendix, 2) in which I use magenta,

green, and yellow ink to print the image on paper. Then, I used the heat transfer technique to incorporate sections from a previous painting into the composition using digital photography. I placed the digital images in the middle section of the composition (green on brown area) as a way to graphically complete several circles. This process lead me to see my body of work as housing color and marks that I can reuse and reorganize in new work.

The use of non-traditional media, such as heat transfers, has broadened the scope of my work. In *Doesn't Always Happen II* (Appendix, 3), I used the heat transfer paper to introduce color to specific areas of the composition. The print began with traditional linoleum block printing in green and yellow ink. The use of heat transfers is evident in the middle section (blue on green area) where the digital imagery completes a small circle surrounded by two larger circles.

The incorporation of technology into the art making process has been stimulating and has allowed my art to go into new directions. When working with technology in art, the challenge is to treat the technology as a tool that is manipulated to aid in the completion of a work. I have learned to use technology in this way and to incorporate it into my process.

Painting

In my first graduate painting class, I was not only learning to work with subject matter, I was also exploring the techniques of oil paints. I chose to work with oil paints because I consider it to be a historically traditional medium that I should work with as a

part of my educational experience. In my painting, *Red and Green* (Appendix, 4), the oil paints worked well in achieving the surfaces and textures that I wanted. The oil paint is thick enough to create solid lines that are in relief. It can also be easily manipulated with tools such as palette knives. I also appreciated the slow drying time of the paint because I was able to work back into the surface.

While working on my painting at this time, I began to express events that were happening in my personal life at the time. I wanted to convey a sense of *inside versus outside* using paint as a metaphor. To do this, oil paint would help me to achieve the texture and depth that I needed to literally show an inside and an outside to the painting. I was able to show this in *Red and Green* (Appendix, 4) by working back into the surface and scratching away areas of paint to reveal what was underneath. This gives the viewer an inside and an outside look at the painting. The inside reveals the layers of paint and the outside reveals the textural surfaces.

Although I began painting with oils, I felt that the health hazards of the oil paints and the solvents were avoidable. For this reason, I made the switch to acrylic paint, which required a new set of skills. With acrylic paints and acrylic mediums, I am able to manipulate the drying times and textures, which mimic the medium of oil without the hazard.

Printmaking

The printmaking process of linoleum block printing is what appeals to me most. In linoleum block printing I am attracted to the physical process of carving, inking, and

printing. I enjoy figuring out the negative and positive spaces within a composition to see what will be successful on the linoleum block. The actual carving is satisfying and makes me feel as if I am actually sculpting the image. Using the brayer, inking the plate, and printing the image is thrilling to me because the end result is a bit of a mystery. Until I actually pull back the paper and reveal the image on the other side, I don't have a clear picture of what I am going to see because of the unintentional marks.

My linoleum prints began as one flat color of ink on white paper and have evolved into multi-layered images with deeper and richer color. Through the use of various papers, inks, and heat transfers, I created my *Tree* series. Here, I have returned to nature in the imagery but my process reflects my focus on the metaphor of layers. In *Fall Tree* (Appendix, 5), I began by carving the image of a barren tree into linoleum. The surface on which I printed was prepared using two papers that were collaged together. Then, I used the brayer to roll ink directly onto the paper. The ink that was rolled onto the surface represented typical fall colors such as red, brown, yellow, and orange. The tree image was then printed in black ink onto the surface of the inked papers. I continued this technique to create images of the other three seasons in *Winter Tree* (Appendix, 6), *Spring Tree* (Appendix, 7), and *Summer Tree* (Appendix, 8). In each piece the tree remains barren, while the colors of each season change in the background through the uses of different papers and inks.

Mixed Media

In addition to combinations of computer art, painting, and printmaking, I use

materials such as plastic, adhesives, handmade papers, and sand. The use of some of these materials is apparent in *½ of 05005 I* (Appendix, 9). In this piece, I continued to explore the idea of inside versus outside, through the use of layered papers and plastic stencils. The ground consists of handmade papers in shades of blues and browns. Then two pieces of thin plastic were glued together and shapes were cut out. The plastic pieces were then attached to the ground and are seen as the linear element on the right side. The plastic pieces appear to be shiny and look almost like a stencil. Because of the transparency of the plastic, the browns and blues remain visible through the plastic, thus placing attention on layering and of what is beneath. The companion piece is entitled *½ of 05005 II* (Appendix, 10) and mirrors the first image in color and content. The steps in the process are the same.

I have found the mixed media and layering approach suited to conveying my idea of inside versus outside. Traditional materials such as paint, ink, and paper were comfortable to work with and produced satisfactory results. However, when I began to add non-traditional materials like computer transfers, plastics, and adhesives to my work, I expanded my own expectations for my art. The combination of these techniques affected my subject matter as well. In moving away from traditional subject matter and materials, my work has become more experimental and more personal.

Conclusion

The MIS program has given me the confidence and knowledge to be able to go beyond what I have been comfortable with for many years. I have learned to look at my

subject matter in terms of meanings, connections, and expressions. I have always heard artists talk about self-expression but I never actually experienced it myself until the MIS program opened my eyes to the possibility. This new awareness is evident as subtle changes have taken place in my work gradually over the last five years. In comparing my first piece of art from the program to my most recent piece of work, the contrast is astounding to me. Where the first images are simple and direct, the recent pieces are developed with complexities and subtleties in meaning. I can see a clear transition from the beginning of my experience to my present work.

The MIS program has been of great benefit to my professional work as well. Teaching art in the classroom all day everyday can be isolating. The MIS classes have provided me with the opportunity to interact with other art educators to share experiences and ideas for lessons. Being introduced to new materials and techniques has carried over into my classroom and has helped me to expand my student's knowledge. Having instructors who have related class work to art history has increased my own knowledge, which in turn will also benefit my students. Discussions within the classroom have been invaluable but the one-on-one attention helped me to focus my work and to go in new directions. It is my plan to continue to develop my art through more exploration of new materials and techniques. This is why I consider my work to be continually evolving, in other words, it is *Undone*.

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Figure 1. *Magenta Leaf*, computer heat transfer, 7 ½" x 9 ½", 2001.



Figure 2. *Doesn't Always Happen III*, ink and computer heat transfer, 18" x 18", 2005.



Figure 3. *Doesn't Always Happen II*, ink and computer heat transfer, 18'' x 18'', 2005.

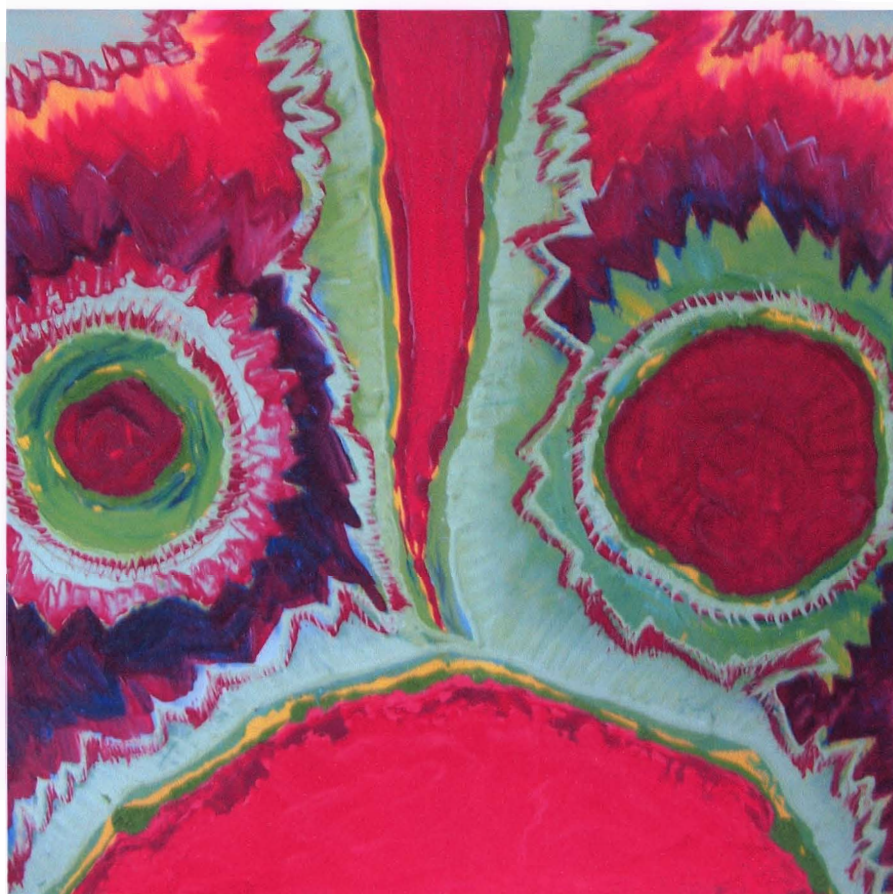


Figure 4. *Red and Green*, oil on wood, 22" x 22", 2004.



Figure 5. *Fall Tree*, ink and paper, 25 ½" x 19 ½", 2003.



Figure 6. *Winter Tree*, ink and paper, 25 ½" x 19 ½", 2003.



Figure 7. *Spring Tree*, ink and paper, 25 ½" x 19 ½", 2003.

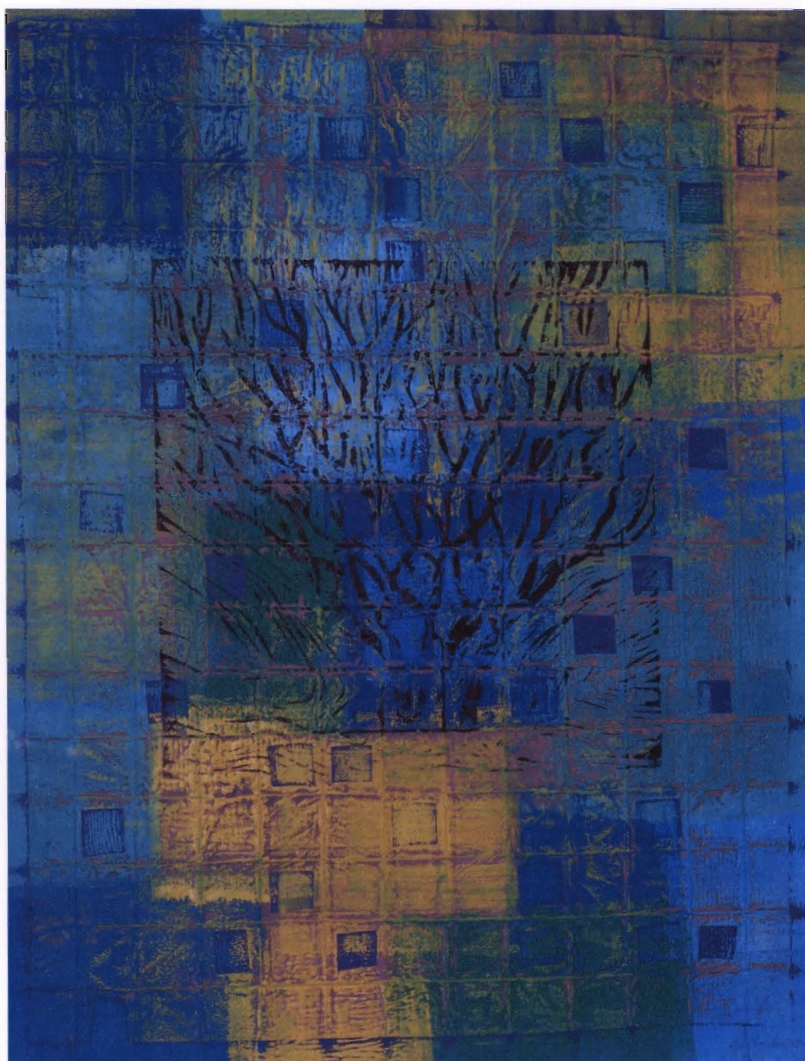


Figure 8. *Summer Tree*, ink and paper, 25 ½" x 19 ½", 2003.



Figure 9. $\frac{1}{2}$ of 05005 I, paper, plastic and paint, 23" x 17", 2005.



Figure 10. $\frac{1}{2}$ of 05005 II, paper, plastic and paint, 23" x 17", 2005.

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